

Writing Guide for Public Documents

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Abstract

Introduction

This *Writing Guide for Public Documents* provides general guidance for (i) drafting Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) public documents; (ii) writing in plain language, an initiative embraced throughout the U.S. Government; and (iii) writing effectively for MCC's public website. This guide addresses MCC-specific grammar rules, issues and word usages that routinely arise in the agency's written materials, answers frequently asked questions and corrects common errors that typically surface when writing MCC's public documents.

Why is this guide necessary?

Applying the *Writing Guide for Public Documents* matters for three reasons:

1. To create uniformity and consistency among MCC's public documents.
2. To generate a clear MCC voice, style and tone.
3. To expedite MCC's clearance process.

Which documents are covered?

This guide covers only public documents—press releases, success stories, blogs, newsletter content, annual reports, and web content. This guide does **not** cover legal documents or formal executive correspondence.

Which style guide takes precedence?

While a variety of style guides exist, writers of MCC public documents should first consult MCC's *Writing Guide for Public Documents* to maintain consistency. In cases where this guide fails to address a specific question, consult [The Associated Press Stylebook](#), the foundation for this guide, and then the [U.S. Government Printing Office \(GPO\) Style Manual](#). Writers also should reference grammar manuals and dictionaries.

Introduction

This *Writing Guide for Public Documents* provides general guidance for (i) drafting Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) public documents; (ii) writing in plain language, an initiative embraced throughout the U.S. Government; and (iii) writing effectively for MCC's public website. This guide addresses MCC-specific grammar rules, issues and word usages that routinely arise in the agency's written materials, answers frequently asked questions and corrects common errors that typically surface when writing MCC's public documents.

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Writing in Plain Language

Plain language is information that readers can understand the first time they read it and use easily.

The U.S. Government has embraced plain language, and government agencies are revising written materials and websites to comply with plain language standards. On June 1, 1998, President Clinton issued an executive memo requiring agencies to write in plain language. In 2004, an interagency task force, working on behalf of the Office of Management and Budget, called for Federal websites to be written in plain language. Most recently, President Obama signed the *Plain Writing Act of 2010*, requiring agencies to write in plain language.

Federal plain language guidelines and other useful links, including plain language training, resources, tips, tools, and examples, can be found at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>.

What is plain language?

Plain language standards that apply to MCC's public documents include, but are not limited to:

- writing for the average reader;
- organizing information to serve the reader's needs;
- applying useful headings;
- using "you" and other pronouns to speak to the reader;
- using the active voice;
- using short sections and sentences;
- using the simplest tense possible—simple present is best;
- using strong, active verbs;
- omitting excess words;
- using concrete, familiar, everyday words;
- using "must" to express requirements; avoiding the ambiguous word "shall";
- placing words carefully (avoids large gaps between the subject, the verb and the object; puts exceptions last; places modifiers correctly);
- using easy-to-read design features;
- using lists and tables to simplify complex material; and
- using no more than two or three subordinate levels.

Examples of plain language

Before	After
Country ownership, transparency and accountability are founding principles of the work of the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and guide its operations worldwide.	Country ownership, transparency and accountability guide the worldwide operations of the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

These traditional kilns use wood, tires and other materials that produce smoke that has had a negative effect on the artisans' health and pollutes the environment.

Traditional kilns use wood, tires and other smoke-producing materials, which harm artisans' health and pollute the environment.

Is plain language training available?

Plain language online training is available and provides helpful instruction. The National Institutes of Health offers a comprehensive online tutorial at <http://execsec.od.nih.gov/plainlang/index.html>.

Case Study

Read the powerful transformation of an actual MCC piece using plain language principles.

Original Submission

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is an innovative and independent US foreign aid agency created by the US Congress in 2004, that is committed to helping lead the fight against global poverty.

MCC responds to requests by eligible States to fund projects that foster economic growth as a means of reducing poverty in the developing world. MCC recognizes that the improvement of aviation safety constitutes a key factor in expanding access to markets and facilitating trade, thus addressing constraints to socio-economic growth and development.

MCC involvement in the field of civil aviation as of September 2011 includes two main airport infrastructure projects: the modernization and expansion of Bamako-Sénou International Airport in Mali and the upgrading of Mafia Island airport in Tanzania, for a total of about \$183 million and \$7 million, respectively.

The project in Mali consists of three components: (a) rehabilitation, reinforcement and extension of the existing runway to 3200 meters, (b) construction of a new passenger terminal, and (c) institutional strengthening of the Malian entities responsible for civil aviation safety and security, airport operations and environmental protection. The latter includes assistance in the establishment of appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure effective management, operation and maintenance of the Airport facilities over the long term, involving both the management of the Airport, as well as the wider regulatory framework governing the civil aviation sector in Mali.

One of the most innovative aspects of the MCC approach is the inclusion of Conditions Precedent in the Compacts (agreements) between the agency and the beneficiary States: i.e. conditions that must be satisfied by the recipient – at its own expense – as a pre-condition for the continuation of MCC disbursements. In the case of MCC's airport infrastructure projects, the inclusion of specific targeted Conditions Precedent constitutes a mechanism that provides added incentive for the beneficiary State to implement significant structural changes aimed at improving civil aviation safety, security and effectiveness.

The MCC approach also involves the creation of a local country-led executing agency, supported by the provision of a robust due diligence and oversight capacity on the part of the funding agency.

Revision

The U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an innovative and independent foreign aid agency created by the U.S. Congress in 2004, partners with well-governed countries throughout the developing world to reduce poverty through economic growth. In its efforts to address constraints to socioeconomic development and sustainable growth, MCC targets aviation safety as a means to expand access to markets and facilitate trade.

MCC improves civil aviation safety through both infrastructure investments and institutional policy reforms.

In Tanzania, for example, MCC invested \$7 million to upgrade the airport on Mafia Island. This investment, which includes paving 1.4 kilometers of runway and making associated site improvements, will reduce transport costs and travel times and increase potential for revenue-generating tourism.

In Mali, MCC is investing \$183 million to modernize and expand Bamako-Sénou International Airport. The project includes rehabilitating, reinforcing and extending the existing runway to 3,200 meters; constructing a new passenger terminal; and strengthening Government of Mali institutions responsible for civil aviation safety and security, airport operations, and environmental protection. This also involves establishing appropriate institutional mechanisms for effective airport management, operation and maintenance; and fostering a stronger regulatory framework governing Mali's civil aviation sector.

MCC requires partner countries to implement major policy reforms alongside large works infrastructure projects. Integrating policy reform and infrastructure development not only enhances economic sustainability, but also furthers civil aviation safety, security and effectiveness.

Abbreviations/Acronyms

1. Abbreviations and acronyms are used to save space and to avoid distracting the reader. Acronyms that abbreviate three or more words are usually written without periods (exception is U.S.S.R.). Abbreviations should only be used if the organization or term appears two or more times in the text. Spell out the full term at its first mention, indicate its abbreviation in parenthesis and use the abbreviation from then on, with the exception of acronyms that would be familiar to most readers, such as MCC and USAID.

Example

Ghana's Millennium Development Authority (MiDA) is responsible for implementing the MCC compact. According to a MiDA spokesperson, the roads project in Ghana was completed on time and on budget. MiDA is updating beneficiaries of the outcomes.

2. Avoid using acronyms where possible. If you must use acronyms, do so sparingly

Example

Wrong:

In 2009, MCC partnered with the World Bank (WB) to fund a Water-to-Market Activity (WTM) through the Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW). The WTM built capacity in MEW while achieving the poverty reduction goals of MCC and the WB.

Better:

In 2009, MCC partnered with the World Bank to fund a Water-to-Market Activity through the Ministry of Energy and Water. The project built capacity in the ministry while achieving the poverty reduction goals of MCC and the World Bank.

3. Two-letter words (United Nations) should be spelled out, or if an acronym is preferred, use periods between the letters (U.N.). Try to avoid using two-letter acronyms in place of nouns. If the acronym spells an unrelated word, use periods between the letters but not spaces. For compound adjectives, hyphenate the acronym.

Example

- She has worked at UNESCO, WWF, the World Bank, OPEC, AfDB, and the IMF. She also spent three years at the City Agricultural Monitoring Project (CAMP).
- He met with representatives from the World Bank and the IMF at the United Nations, where they discussed IMF- and U.N.-led initiatives and MCC-funded projects.

Bibliography/Endnotes

MCC occasionally promotes academic or white papers on development topics. These papers cite facts, figures and important statements. To properly cite material or data used from other sources, writers can

consult the many available style guides, including the Associated Press Stylebook and the Chicago Manual of Style.

Capitalization

1. Do not capitalize seasons.

Example

- winter
- spring
- summer
- fall

2. Capitalize specific regions, but not ordinal directions.

Example

She worked in the Northern Zone of El Salvador, but enjoyed traveling south to the urban areas.

courtesy titles

Do not use.

Example

Paul Applegarth was MCC's first CEO. Applegarth served in the position from 2003 to 2005.

Foreign Words

1. If possible, avoid using foreign words. While MCC partner countries use multiple languages, English is the official language for MCC public documents. Foreign words and abbreviations (versus, vs.; et cetera, etc.) that are accepted universally into the English language may be used without explanation. However, if a foreign word or abbreviation is not universally understood, place it in italics and provide an explanation.

Example

Stoves emit a toxic brew of pollution in traditional *ger* homes, circular felt dwellings popular in Mongolia's capital.

2. Consult the State Department's website (www.state.gov) for the primary spelling of foreign place names; do not italicize foreign place names.

Example

Ulaanbaatar is the capital of Mongolia.

3. For personal names, follow the individual's preference for an English spelling; do not italicize foreign personal names.

Example

- Moummer al-Kadhafi,
- Muammer Qadhafi,
- Moammer Gadhafi

4. When spelling English-language titles of foreign organizations, follow the preference of the external organization.

Example

World Food Programme, not World Food Program

names

1. Use the person's given and surname on first reference. Use only the surname on subsequent references.

Example

Joe Smith benefits from MCC's agriculture program in Moldova. Because of new irrigation, Smith can grow an additional 10 hectares of wheat.

2. In cultures where only one name is traditionally used, provide a brief explanation on a subsequent reference as to why this is the case.

Example

Abdulhaq has worked as a translator with the U.S. military in Afghanistan for three years. Abdulhaq, who has only one name like many Afghans, has worked with Army and Marine units.

3. In some cultures, the surname precedes the given name. On first references, follow that person's cultural protocol but use the surname on subsequent references. There is no need to provide an explanation.

Example

In 2013, Park Geun-hye was elected president of South Korea. Park is the first woman to hold the office.

Numbers

1. When numbers appear in text, numbers below 10 should be spelled out. Use figures for 10 and above and for numbers that require more than two words to spell out. However, always spell out any numbers that begin a sentence or re-write the sentence to avoid starting with a numeral.

Example

RIGHT:

Three components of the compact are expected to alleviate poverty for more than 150,000 Salvadorans.

WRONG:

560 farmers were trained by the MCC-funded project.

RIGHT:

The MCC-funded project trained 560 farmers.

WRONG:

12 beneficiaries doubled their incomes.

RIGHT:

Twelve beneficiaries doubled their incomes.

2. Do not use “a” as a replacement for “one”; be precise.

Example

WRONG:

More than a million people will benefit from the compact.

RIGHT:

More than one million people will benefit from the compact.

3. All percentages should be numerals; the word “percent” must be written out.

Example

- More than 20 percent of the farmers increased their incomes.
- More than 9 percent of farmers raised higher-value crops.

4. Spell out fractions less than one and use hyphens between the words.

Example

- two-thirds, four-fifths, one-half
- Over two-thirds of the compact investment is obligated.

5. When only a month and a year are used, do not separate the year with a comma.

Example

Burkina Faso signed its compact in July 2008.

6. When pluralizing a decade, do not use an apostrophe.

Example

WRONG:

Zambia experienced hyperinflation during the 1990's.

RIGHT:

Zambia experienced hyperinflation during the 1990s.

7. Very large numbers may be expressed in numerals followed by million or billion. The currency should not be noted unless it is something other than U.S. dollars. Convert to U.S. dollars where possible. Avoid using a currency symbol and stated currency in the same sentence.

Example

WRONG:

MCC invests more than \$7 billion dollars to reduce poverty.

RIGHT:

MCC invests more than \$7 billion to reduce poverty.

ACCEPTABLE:

MCC investments were complemented by an AUD \$2 million AusAID grant.

BETTER:

MCC investments were complemented by a \$1.98 million AusAID grant.

Possessives

1. For plural nouns not ending in *s*, add *'s*.

Example

women's rights

2. For plural nouns ending in *s*, add only an apostrophe.

Example

- girls' schools
- beneficiaries' stories

3. For nouns plural in form, singular in meaning, add only an apostrophe.

Example

- measles' effects
- United States' generosity

4. For singular nouns not ending in *s*, add 's.

Example

compact's goals

5. For singular common nouns ending in *s*, add 's unless the next word begins with *s*.

Example

- eyewitness's account
- eyewitness' story

publication and policy titles

Italicize and capitalize the name of the publication or policy only if it is the official title.

Example

RIGHT:

MCC released *Report on the Criteria and Methodology for Determining the Eligibility of Candidate Countries for Millennium Challenge Account Assistance in Fiscal Year 2012*.

RIGHT:

MCC released its annual country selection criteria and methodology report.

RIGHT:

MCC operates under its *Gender Policy* during implementation.

RIGHT:

MCC recently amended its environmental and social protection policy to formally adopt the International Finance Corporation Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability as part of continuing efforts to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of MCC compacts and improve our standards for managing environmental and social risks.

Punctuation

Brackets, []

Avoid brackets. Use parentheses instead or recast the sentence.

Colons, :

1. The most frequent use of a colon is at the end of a sentence to introduce and to separate lists, tabulations and text. Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complex sentence.

Example

This is true: No amount of development assistance will end global poverty unless the engine of private sector, market-led growth is ignited as well.

2. The colon can be effective in giving emphasis.

Example

MCC has one mission: global poverty reduction through growth.

3. Colons go outside quotation marks unless they are part of the quotation itself.

Commas, ,

1. Commas always go inside quotation marks.

Example

She said, “The compensation package helped me start a new business,” and her son nodded.

2. Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series of words.

Example

The flag is red, white and blue.

3. Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases.

Example

MCC partner countries are strengthening policy performance, investing in their own development solutions, deepening capacity and transparency, and delivering the results their citizens demand.

4. Use a comma to introduce a complete one-sentence quotation within a paragraph.

Example

MCC's CEO said, "We are pursuing greater private sector engagement."

Hyphens

1. Be consistent in the use of hyphens, but do not overuse them
2. Hyphens are joiners.
3. Use a hyphen to link words, compound adjectives or to mark the division of single words at the end of a line. Follow a hyphen with a space only in constructions such as pre- and post-manufacturing waste.
4. A hyphen is used when two or more words serve together as a single modifier before a noun. Yet, when the same compound adjectives follow the noun, no hyphen is used.

Example

- well-known NGO
- that NGO is well known

5. Use hyphens to link all the words in the compound modifier except the adverb *very* and all adverbs that end in *ly*. However, a hyphen is not needed for common two-word terms, like private sector.

Example

- full-time commitment
- first-quarter disbursements
- private sector growth
- easily remembered objectives
- highly sophisticated irrigation equipment

6. Use hyphenation within a range.

Example

The impact evaluation estimates 10- to 20-year benefits.

7. Use an en-dash to connect compound words, items of equal weight and page ranges. To create an en-dash in Microsoft Word, hold the control key and type the minus sign (the one on the numeric keypad to the right, not on the top of the keyboard). Do not use spaces on either side of an en-dash.

Example

- pages 46–52
- Civil War–era
- male–female

8. Use an em-dash for emphasis or to denote an abrupt change in thought. To create an em-dash in Microsoft Word, type two hyphens. Do not use spaces on either side of an em-dash.

Example

- This difficult component of the compact—an unprecedented undertaking—requires the majority of staff time and resources.
- MCC’s core principles—policy performance, country ownership, results, transparency—set a new standard in aid effectiveness.

Question Marks, ?

1. Use a question mark after a direct question; do not use a question mark after indirect questions, use a period.

Example

WRONG:

The MCA director repeatedly asked what caused the low disbursement rate?

RIGHT:

The MCA director repeatedly asked what caused the low disbursement rate.

2. A question mark is placed inside or outside quotation marks depending on the meaning.

Example

- Who wrote “Gone With the Wind”?
- The staffer asked, “Who handles private sector engagement?”

Semicolons, ;

1. Semicolons are generally used to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma can convey, but with less separation than a period implies. Semicolons are used to separate items in a series if they are long or contain commas.

Example

Congressional Democrats labeled the Republican proposal with names like Ducking, Dodging and Destroying; the Slash, Burn and Pander Act; and The Bill Which Tap Dances Around the Question of Revenue and Lifting the Debt Ceiling.

2. Place semicolons outside quotation marks.

Example

She said, “The compensation package helped me start a new business”; many of her neighbors started businesses as well.

Spacing

As per GPO, AP and Chicago style manuals, always use a single space after a period, exclamation mark and question mark at the end of a sentence in public documents.

Titles/Offices

1. Avoid abbreviating titles. Always spell out and capitalize titles when they precede proper names, but generally not when they follow proper names or appear alone.

Example

WRONG:

She met with Sen. Richard G. Lugar.

RIGHT:

She met with Senator Richard G. Lugar.

- The prime minister toured MCC projects in her country.
- John Doe, the current president, plans to run again.

2. Do not capitalize former, -ex or -elect when used in a title.

Example

- She met with President-elect Obama.
- She met with former President George W. Bush.

a while/awhile

Awhile means “for a time”; “for” is part of the meaning already. A while means “a period of time.”

Example

- The farmer rested awhile.
- She sat under a tree for a while to assess her work.

affect/effect

Typically, if you are referring to a thing (a noun), use effect. If you are referring to an action (a verb), use affect.

Example

- The rainy season had a negative effect on the construction schedule.
- The rainy season negatively affected the construction schedule.

and/as well as

Use “and” instead of “as well as” for simplicity and brevity.

and/or

Reconfigure the sentence to avoid using and/or.

Example

The Zambians plan to invest in tourism and/or irrigation.
BETTER:
The Zambians plan to invest in tourism, irrigation or both.

colloquial words and casual phrases

Avoid colloquialisms. Informal words or phrases are best suited for conversation, not MCC’s public documents.

ensure/assure/insure

To “assure” a person of something is to make him or her confident of it. To “ensure” that something

happens is to make certain that it does. To “insure” is to issue an insurance policy.

Example

- The Indonesian negotiators assured their MCC counterparts of their commitment to transparency.
- The compact ensures a series of reforms as conditions for further funding.
- The contractor insured his work to protect against possible liabilities.

fewer/less

“Fewer” refers to things that can be counted (fewer acres, fewer roads). “Less” usually refers to quantities of things that can’t be counted (less congestion, less uncertainty).

his/hers/theirs

“His” and “her” refer to singular, gender-specific subjects. “Theirs” always refers to a plural subject.

in order to

Unless there’s some need for special emphasis, drop “in order to” and simply use “to.”

like/such as

It’s a matter of taste; either is acceptable for MCC public documents.

more than/over

“More than” refers to quantity. “Over” refers to a physical location.

not only/but also

Treat the pair as flip sides of the same coin. The two sides must match and should be separated by a comma.

Example

Post-compact results demonstrate not only whether key deliverables were met, but also whether activities affected beneficiaries’ incomes.

since/because

Don’t use “since” to mean “because”; use “because” to mean “because.” “Since” is typically used to indicate

a time period.

Example

WRONG:

Since her home was in the area of the planned new road, she was compensated.

RIGHT:

Since the beginning of the compact, the road rehabilitation project experienced delays.

subject/verb agreement for plural/singular words

1. Subject and verb must agree. If the subject is singular, so is the verb. If the subject is plural, so is the verb. The key to making the subject and verb agree is to correctly identify the subject. Simplify the sentence in your mind to eliminate what is extraneous to pinpoint the subject.

Example

- MCA-Tanzania hires a gender specialist.
- MCA-Tanzania and MCA-Ghana hire gender specialists.

2. When specific amounts are the subject of a sentence, use a singular verb.

Example

- More than \$2 million is set aside for monitoring and evaluation in Mongolia.

3. When the subject of a sentence can be interpreted as either singular or plural, like *couple*, *total*, *majority*, *number*, *any*, *all*, or *none*, the verb to follow is singular or plural, depending on the meaning.
4. Subjects that stand for a group of things—*couple*, *total*, *staff*, *majority*, and *number*—sometimes mean the group as a whole (singular) and sometimes mean the individual members of the group (plural). The use of “the” before the word (*the total*, *the majority*, *the staff*) is often a clue that it’s singular, so use a singular verb. When “a” comes before the word, and especially when “of” comes after, it’s probably plural, so use a plural verb.
5. Criteria, data and agenda, though technically plural words, have evolved over time into singular nouns taking singular verbs. No plural form is necessary when using plain language.

Example

WRONG:

The data are promising.

RIGHT:

The data is promising.

6. *Memorandum* (*memo*) is a singular noun; the plural of memorandum is *memoranda* (preferred use) or *memorandums*.

superlatives

Use superlatives (*very*, *most*, *ever*, etc.) sparingly.

that/which

“That” is a *restrictive* sentence element that limits, or *restricts*, the meaning of the word or words that it applies to. “Which” is generally a *nonrestrictive* sentence element that gives added information about the word or words it applies to, and can be omitted from the sentence without changing the essential meaning. *Nonrestrictive* elements are always set off with punctuation (most often commas or dashes). If you can drop the clause and not lose the point of the sentence, use “which.” If you can’t, use “that.” Place a “which” clause inside commas. Do not place a “that” clause inside commas.

Example

NONESSENTIAL TO THE POINT OF THE SENTENCE:

The Bowen Building, which was featured in a widely panned Owen Wilson film, serves as headquarters for the Millennium Challenge Corporation. [*“which was featured in a widely panned Owen Wilson film” is not essential to the meaning of the sentence and can be omitted.*]

ESSENTIAL TO THE POINT OF THE SENTENCE:

The building that serves as headquarters for the Millennium Challenge Corporation was featured in a widely panned Owen Wilson film. [*“that serves as headquarters for the Millennium Challenge Corporation” is essential to the meaning of the sentence and cannot be omitted.*]

RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE–THAT:

Farms that irrigate double their agricultural production. [*“That irrigate” is essential to the meaning of the sentence and to qualifying what farms double their agricultural production.*]

NONRESTRICTIVE CLAUSE–WHICH:

MCC-supported farming cooperatives, which invested in irrigation, are doubling their crop output. [*“Which invested in irrigation” is not essential to the meaning of the sentence and deleting it does not alter what MCC-supported farming cooperatives are doing.*]

that/who

A person is a “who.” A thing, on the other hand, is a “that.”

Example

- The farmer who learned new irrigation techniques increased her income.
- The irrigation canals that serve the region require ongoing maintenance.

activity

Only capitalize when it is the official and complete activity title in a compact program.



administration

Do not capitalize when used to refer to a presidential administration.

Example:

- MCC was created under the Bush administration.
- The administration prioritized global development in its foreign affairs strategy.

Only capitalize when part of a formal title.

Example:

The Federal Aviation Administration governs airport guidelines.

ambassador

Do not capitalize unless accompanied by the name.

anti-corruption

Always hyphenate.

board of directors

Do not capitalize it unless used as part of the specific entity's formal title.

Example:

- MCC's Board of Directors meets Wednesday to select eligible countries. At its last meeting, the board voted to reinstate a suspended compact.
- Every MCA is governed by a board of directors or a similar governing body.

capacity building

Do not hyphenate.

compact

Compact is capitalized when used as a proper noun (directly preceded by the country name) and officially referred to as the “Millennium Challenge Compact.” Otherwise, do not capitalize it, including when preceded by “MCC” or used as an adjective (compact implementation, compact funding, compact development).

Example:

- The compact development process is often long and drawn-out, but development of the El Salvador Compact proved to be different.
- The MCC compact with Ghana was signed in 2005.
- Ghana’s Millennium Challenge Compact was signed in 2005.
- The Ghana Compact focuses on infrastructure and agricultural capacity building.
- MCC expects civil society consultation in the compact development process.

compact closeout

Use closeout, not close-out. Do not capitalize.

diaspora

Do not capitalize

farmers’ association

Use farmers’ association, not farmer association or farmers association. Do not capitalize.

federal

Always capitalize when referring to a governmental body or thing. Do not capitalize when referring to a political ideology.

Example:

- Federal government;
- Federal websites;
- Federal Register;
- federal form of government

G-8, G-20, G-77

Use hyphen. No need to spell out “Group of 8” on first or subsequent references.

governments

Use Government of [short-form country name] on first reference. Use country-specific adjective and “government” in lowercase on subsequent reference if preferred for style. Avoid using an acronym.

Example:

RIGHT:

MCC and the Government of Jordan signed a five-year, \$275 million compact.

RIGHT:

MCC is partnering with the Jordanian government on rehabilitating the As-Samra Wastewater Treatment Plant.

WRONG:

MCC and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan signed a five-year, \$275 million compact.

WRONG:

MCC is partnering with GOJ on rehabilitating the As-Samra Wastewater Treatment Plant.

indicator

Do not capitalize individual indicators or categories of indicators.

Example:

- freedom of information indicator
- ruling justly, investing in people, encouraging economic freedom

Internet

Always capitalize

intervention

Avoid usage, as this can be too technical for a public audience. Suggested alternatives include:

- programs
- work
- investments
- partnership
- compact

lessons learned

Avoid this phrase. Simply using “lessons” is better, because a lesson is not a lesson if it is not learned.

Example:

MCC is using lessons learned from its impact evaluation to improve future farmer training programs.

BETTER:

MCC is using the lessons from its impact evaluation to improve future farmer training programs.

low income country

Do not capitalize; do not hyphenate. Abbreviate using LIC.

lower middle income country

Do not capitalize; do not hyphenate. Abbreviate using LMIC.

MCAs

1. Refers to the accountable entities in partner countries responsible for implementing MCC compacts. Spell out on first reference, except in blogs, and include a standard definition in all public documents. The standard definition explains that the MCA entity is “the local organization implementing the country’s MCC compact.” Afterward, use “MCA-[Country name].”

Example:

Millennium Challenge Account-Indonesia is the local organization implementing the country’s MCC compact. MCA-Indonesia will introduce ecofriendly practices in rural villages.

2. Some MCC partner countries have been granted waivers to use other names to designate the entity implementing their MCC compact.

Example:

- FOMILENIO (MCA-El Salvador)
- Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund (MCA-Georgia)

MCC

Refer to MCC as “the Millennium Challenge Corporation” or “MCC,” not “the MCC.” Spell out on first reference, except in blogs.

Example:

RIGHT:

The Millennium Challenge Corporation seeks to reduce poverty through growth.

RIGHT:

MCC seeks to reduce poverty through growth.

WRONG:

The MCC seeks to reduce poverty through growth.

microfinance

Not micro-finance.

Millennium Challenge Account (MCA)

Millennium Challenge Account refers to the development assistance account created by the U.S. Congress and managed by MCC.

Millennium Challenge Act of 2003

Do not refer to the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003, MCC's governing statute, as "MCA" or as "legislation." Refer to the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 as a formally enacted statute.

Example:

Millennium Challenge Act of 2003, as amended (if legal reference, add cite 22 USC 7706 et seq.)

NGO

Refers to *nongovernmental organization*. Spell it out on the first reference and then use NGO or NGOs.

Example:

nongovernmental organization (NGO)

partner countries

Use partner countries, not country partners.

private sector

Do not capitalize either word or hyphenate when used as a compact modifier.

Example:

Private sector activity is the engine to economic growth.

project

Only capitalize when it is the official and complete project title in a compact program.

Example:

The Tanzania Compact's Energy Sector Project will improve electricity service and coverage through the addition of new power generation, transmission and distribution capacity, and much-needed reinforcement of the existing network.

public-private partnership

Hyphenate the compound modifier.

stakeholder

When possible, it is better to be more specific than use the catch-all phrase “stakeholder.”

Example:**AVOID:**

MCA-Indonesia consulted with stakeholders when forming its compact.

BETTER:

MCA-Indonesia consulted with government ministries, civil society and residents of potential beneficiary communities when designing its compact.

states

Spell out full name of the state when used with a city name. This is an exception to AP.

Example:**RIGHT:**

MCC does not have a compact with New Orleans, Louisiana.

WRONG:

MCC does not have a compact with Alexandria, Va.

Threshold Program

Capitalize when referring to the overall MCC Threshold Program or a country's specific Threshold Program. On subsequent references, use of lowercase "program" is acceptable.

Example:

- MCC's Threshold Program assists countries with policy reforms.
- Kenya's Threshold Program began in 2005 and includes agricultural training.
- The Honduras Threshold Program Agreement designed to bring good governance practices to Honduras. The three-year, \$15.6 million program will focus on improving public financial management and create more effective and transparent public-private partnerships.

toward

Use toward, not towards

U.S. Government

Always capitalize government when preceded by U.S.

United Nations

Always capitalize both words. Spell out United Nations when it is used as a noun. Use U.N. (always with periods) only as an adjective.

Example:

He visited the United Nations in New York to learn about U.N.-led programs.

United States

Always capitalize both words. Spell out United States when it is used as a noun. Use U.S. (always with periods) only as an adjective. Never begin a sentence with U.S. Never write America as a noun, but you may use American as an adjective.

Example:

WRONG:

The U.S. funded the compact.

RIGHT:

The United States funded the compact.

RIGHT:

The United States champions U.S.-led initiatives.

RIGHT:

United States-led initiatives champion economic growth.

upper middle income country

Do not capitalize; do not hyphenate. Abbreviate using UMIC.

USAID

Use U.S. Agency for International Development on first reference and USAID on subsequent references. Do not put USAID in parenthesis after first reference. Do not use United States Agency for International Development.

water-user association

website

Use website, not Web site, Web Site or web site. Only capitalize website when it is the first word in a sentence.

windup/wind up

Windup is an adjective and a noun. Wind up is a verb. Hyphenate neither.

Example:

- MCC is ensuring an orderly windup of the Mali Compact.
- MCC is winding up its operations in Mali.

Writing for MCC's Public Website

Readers approach online text differently than printed text. They expect fast access to information, which is why they typically come to a website with specific ideas or words already in mind related to their search. As a result, users first scan for those words or phrases before beginning to actually read. Apply the following nine best practices to write your web content to help users quickly find what they are searching for:

1. Make it short.
 - Less is more.
 - Cut unnecessary words.
 - Write simple, short, straightforward sentences.
 - Start each paragraph with the key point.
 - Write in the inverted pyramid style: The first paragraph should be no longer than one sentence and should present the facts of the following content in 26 words or less; the remaining paragraphs should present the facts descending from most to least important.
 - Use bullet points.
 - Make the content important to the visitor.
 - Make every word count.
2. Write in active voice—use strong, active verbs.
3. Make the text easy to read, as if it is a conversation.
4. Run spell check.
5. Add contextual hyperlinks.
 - Use links to direct users to primary source information rather than including it in your content.
 - Add layers of information by linking to them instead of displaying all information on a single page.
 - Do not ever use “click here.” Select a word or phrase that most accurately describes what the user will find upon clicking a link.
6. Make text digestible in “chunks.”
 - Semantically structuring your content gives the user a quick understanding of how the content elements relate and which concepts are major versus minor.
 - Use headings to draw the eye to main ideas and minor ideas; write short headings that describe the content contained below them.
 - Use bulleted lists to present a series of ideas or thoughts
7. Avoid footnotes or endnotes in web content.
8. Use [MCC's Writing Guide for Public Documents](#) to write content for the web.
9. Web content must be in [plain language](#).

Are additional resources available on writing for the web?

Excellent resources for an in-depth look at writing for the web include:

- Redish, Janice (Ginny). *Letting Go of the Words*. Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2007; and
- Krug, Steve. *Don't Make Me Think*, second edition. New Riders Publishing, 2005.

Reducing Poverty Through Growth

